

LETTERS to the Editor

Comments on Traffic Medicine

To the Editor: In the traffic issue of CALIFORNIA MEDICINE, the articles cover familiar ground. Each author has his own pet remedy. Caution the driver. Improve his harness. Motivate the alcoholic. Admonish the young. Screen the near-sighted. Straighten the highways. Pad the dashboard. Buckle the steering column. Get more ambulances. Teach more first aid. Etc., etc.

What I want to point out is that we have been doing all these things for years—with negligible results.

Nowhere in all this wordage did I see any mention of a much more fundamental attack on the problem: gas rationing. The assumption always is that driving is a necessary component of American life, not to be tampered with under any circumstances.

To be sure, *some* driving is necessary. But a whole lot is not. Let me quote two figures you rarely see mentioned: (1) Over 60 percent of all trips are less than five miles. (2) At least 30 percent of all driving is for frivolous (that is purely recreational) purposes.

Gas rationing would be inconvenient but it would not cause the collapse of our civilization. On the contrary. As doctors, we should stress that the car is a major threat to public health, just like cancer, heart disease, and stroke.

Isn't it odd that we would rather spend millions futsing around than take the bull by the horns?

CLIFFORD L. GRAVES, M.D.
La Jolla

To the Editor: The current issue of CALIFORNIA MEDICINE (February 1972) devoted to Traffic Medicine is outstanding. In particular, I appreciate the emphasis that you have placed on the magnitude of the traffic safety problem.

Comparing it with the Vietnam war deaths puts it in a perspective that has long been neglected.

There is no longer a question that at least 50 percent of fatal auto accidents are caused by the ingestion of alcohol. In particular, fatal accidents in young adult males has even a higher correlation with alcohol ingestion (66 to 75 percent). So at least 27,000 of the 54,000 auto accident deaths are directly related to this factor.

Many of the younger generation, and even many of the more responsible sociologists and scientists studying the marijuana problem, are using a logic that "marijuana is really no worse than alcohol." But isn't 27,000 deaths a year enough?

ALBERT E. WARRENS, M.D.
Chico

To the Editor: I have greatly enjoyed your Special Issue of CALIFORNIA MEDICINE, February 1972, particularly the editorial "Traffic Medicine."

Your comparison on the cover of one year of motor vehicle, U.S. casualties with Vietnam War total casualties, 1961 to 1970, is solidly impressive.

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To the Editor: The recent symposium on traffic safety was excellent but omitted mention of one thing which I believe is very important, viz. the importance of identifying an automobile involved in any breach of the law along with the responsible owner. This can easily be established by the license number. Easy, that is, if the license plate is observed under good illumination at a distance of less than two car lengths and if the plate is not recessed, battered or otherwise obscured. This is best accomplished by kneeling behind the car with a flashlight!

Daily press reports speak of the car which escapes from a hit and run accident, a robbery,